

Center for
GLOBAL EDUCATION
and EXPERIENCE

Social Work 294
International Social Welfare: The Mexican Context

Instructors: Ann Lutterman-Aguilar and Antonio Ortega

Course Description

This course develops students' understanding of current social, economic, political and cultural realities in Mexico through an exploration of Mexican culture and history. Particular emphasis will be placed on intercultural communication and the role of U.S. foreign policy in Mexico both historically and currently. This understanding will frame students' knowledge of contemporary social welfare and social work practice with migrants and immigrants in the United States, with particular emphasis on the Minnesota context.

Required Texts

Aguilar, José Victor and Miguel Cavada Diez. Translated by Kathy Ogle. *Free Trade: Free Rein for Transnational Corporations*. EPICA, 2003.

Foster, Lynn V. *A Brief History of Mexico, Revised Edition*. Checkmark Books, 2004.

Fong, Rowena and Sharlene B.C.L. Furuto, eds. *Culturally Competent Practice: Skills, Interventions and Evaluations*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001.

González, Juan. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*. Penguin Books, 2001.

Nussbaum, Stan. *American Cultural Baggage: How to Recognize and Deal with It*. Orbis Books, 2006.

Perkins, John. *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*. Plume, 2006.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Explain key elements of the pre-Colombian Mexican "cosmovision" that unites indigenous groups within Mexico and continues to influence Mexican culture today;
2. Discuss and debate the contemporary legacy of the Conquest of Mexico with regard to its impact on marginalized populations, as determined by race, class, gender, and sexuality;
3. Identify key moments in Mexican history that have shaped contemporary Mexican politics, economics, social welfare, and culture;
4. Discuss the most important social, economic, and political issues in Mexico today;
5. Demonstrate knowledge of intercultural communication theories;
6. Compare and contrast dominant U.S. and Mexican cultural values, assumptions, and norms;
7. Discuss key issues in cross-cultural communication between Mexicans and U.S. citizens;
8. Identify potential areas of misunderstanding or miscommunication based on cultural differences that a U.S. social worker may encounter when working with Mexican immigrants;
9. Analyze the role of U.S. foreign policy in Mexico both historically and currently, with emphasis upon NAFTA and U.S. immigration policy;
10. Demonstrate knowledge of current Mexico/U.S. immigration and migration issues;
11. Discuss the impact of immigration/migration on social work service in Minnesota;
12. Critically reflect upon their own cultural perspectives and the ways in which these shape their understanding of social work practice in general; and
13. Integrate and apply knowledge of Mexican history, intercultural communication, and immigration issues to their professional responsibilities as social workers in Minnesota.

Course Requirements (100% = 100 points)

1. **Class Participation** (10% = 10 points)

Effective class participation includes regular attendance, completion of assigned readings before class sessions, participation in class sessions, and a demonstrated effort to dialogue with speakers, ask probing questions, and relate assigned readings to class discussion topics. Students will demonstrate comprehension of assigned readings by completing spontaneous writing/journaling exercises, and/or giving mini-presentations on specific articles. Demonstrated improvement of work will also be taken into account. Because participation is essential to the learning process, any student who misses more than two class activities for any reason must speak to the instructors. If a student must miss a class session due to illness, s/he is expected to inform the instructors in advance or as soon thereafter as possible. Students are also responsible for getting notes, handouts and information regarding announcements from other students if they arrive late to class or miss a class session.

2. **Short Reading Exercises** (35% = 35 points)

Students will be given seven short reading exercises. Reading Exercises will be due at the start of class and will not receive any credit if turned in after that time (unless prior arrangements have been made for an extension), as the purpose of these exercises is for students to be familiar enough with the required readings to be able to discuss or draw upon them during the class session. Reading Exercises must be completed individually rather than collectively and may not be altered during the class discussion. Each Reading Exercise is worth five points (5% of the total course grade).

3. **Short Reflection and Analysis Papers** (30% = 30 points)

Students will write two 1000 word papers (approximately four typed pages or six handwritten pages, depending upon handwriting) in which they reflect upon key themes in Mexican history and/or their intercultural interactions with Mexican host families, friends, and others that they encounter in their internships or service-learning settings. In each reflection paper, students will be expected to apply specific theoretical concepts studied in class to the analysis of their own experiences in Mexico. For example, in one paper students may be asked to analyze the way in which linguistic differences between English and Spanish relate to different perceptions, thought, and behavior patterns, while another paper may focus on cultural differences in approaches to conflict management. Each paper is worth 15 points, or 15% of the total course grade.

4. **Cultural Analysis Paper** (15% = 15 points)

Students will write a paper in which they discuss key issues in cross-cultural communication between Mexicans and U.S. citizens and identify potential areas of misunderstanding or miscommunication based on cultural differences, drawing upon their own experiences in Mexico, as well as examples from the following books: Condon's *Good Neighbors: Communicating with the Mexicans*, Rodríguez and Vincent's *Common Border, Uncommon Paths: Race, Culture, and National Identity in U.S.-Mexican Relations*, Ross's *Mexico: A Guide to the People, Politics and Culture*, and Stewart and Bennett's *American Cultural Patterns*. Students will also be asked to reflect upon the thesis of the article entitled "The Myth of Cross-Cultural Competence" by Ruth G. Dean (2001). All papers should include the following: a) an overview of dominant U.S. and Mexican cultural values, assumptions, norms, and communication styles; b) implications for U.S. social workers' interactions with Mexican clients, and c) discussion of the student's own development as a cross-culturally competent, ethical social work professional.

Students should listen to the tapes that they made prior to the start of the semester and reflect upon the ways in which their own beliefs, knowledge, and skills have been strengthened and/or changed over the course of the semester.

5. **Social Work Applications Project and Oral Presentation** (10% = 10 points)

Students will design and complete a final project that synthesizes what they have learned over the course of the semester in such a way that it can be applied by social workers working with Mexican clients in the United States. The purpose of the final project is to help students bring closure to their semester and to prepare them for their return to the United States where they will be expected to apply what they have learned. Sample projects include a power point or slide presentation teaching social workers or social work students about a certain aspect of Mexican culture or on an important issue such as immigration or U.S.- Mexico relations; a teaching tool that can be used in this course or others in the future; an article for a social work journal; a resource that could be used by a specific client population or by the student her/himself. The project does not require any additional research but rather a review of all required readings and notes from class and guest speakers or excursions throughout the semester. Projects may include student-run forums, art or photo exhibits, slide and dramatic presentations and other forms of creative expression but must be approved in advance by the course instructor. All projects must be accompanied by a 10-minute class presentation.

Additional Comments

Explanation of Grades

Augsburg’s grading system uses the following definitions:

| Grade | Grade Points | Description |
|-------|--------------|--------------|
| A | 4.00 | Excellent |
| A- | 3.67 | |
| B+ | 3.33 | |
| B | 3.00 | Good |
| B- | 2.67 | |
| C+ | 2.33 | |
| C | 2.00 | Satisfactory |
| C- | 1.67 | |
| D+ | 1.33 | |
| D | 1.00 | Poor |
| D- | 0.67 | |
| F | 0.00 | Failure |

A “Pass” grade is 2.0 or above.

Grading Policy and Late Assignments

You must submit assignments on time. If you need an extension, you must talk to us **in advance** to negotiate a new deadline. If you have not been given an extension in advance and you turn in a late assignment, you will be docked half a grade (from a 4.0 to a 3.5 or 3.5 to a 3.0, 3.0 to a 2.5, 2.5 to a 2.0, etc.) If you are more than one week late, you will be docked a full grade. No assignments will be accepted more than two weeks after the original deadline; a “0” will be given after that. Assignments due near the end of the semester will not be accepted after the last day of the semester.

Augsburg Honesty Policy

You are expected to follow the Augsburg Honesty Policy which is printed in the program manual. We assume that you have read the honesty policy, understand it, and are following it. Except when the assignment expressly encourages group work, it is assumed that all course work will be your own. You may not copy other students' work. The first occurrence of plagiarism will result in the failure of the assignment. A student who commits plagiarism a second time will fail the course.

Students' Rights and Responsibilities

Students with formally diagnosed learning or physical differences have legal rights to course modifications. Those who qualify should identify themselves to the instructor as soon as possible in order to obtain extra assistance.